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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001641

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER/GERMAIN
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: UNSCOL BEMOANS SLOW PROGRESS ON 1701,
DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

REF: A. BEIRUT 01639
[B](#). BEIRUT 01638
[C](#). BEIRUT 01637

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#). (C) UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) Michael Williams expressed concern on November 15 that the Lebanese might be slowing on establishing diplomatic ties with Syria. He also expressed concern regarding progress on UNSCR 1701. Williams thought it possible that emerging GOL hesitation regarding diplomatic ties with Syria might be behind the vehement March 14 criticism of Interior Minister Ziad Baroud's trip to Damascus. Williams planned to ask UNSYG Ban Ki-Moon to place telephone calls to both the Syrian and Lebanese sides to push progress on diplomatic ties. Williams will also discuss with Ban a visit to Lebanon, which might occur at the earliest in January 2009.

[2](#). (C) Like us, Williams is hearing more about a possible role for independents in the spring 2009 parliamentary elections. Williams is exploring establishing a code of conduct for the parliamentary elections to complement international election observation, which he fears Lebanese see as the "be all, end all" of election standards.
End Summary.

LEBANESE-SYRIAN RELATIONS, BORDER CONTROL

[3](#). (C) UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Michael Williams told Ambassador on November 15 that he thought March 14 rancor following Interior Minister Ziad Baroud's trip to Damascus could indicate deeper hesitation among "elements" of the coalition regarding the establishment of diplomatic ties with Syria. Williams, accompanied by UNSCOL Poloffs Salvatore Pedulla and Rami Shehadeh, stressed that Baroud was an "absolutely key" figure in the GOL. Williams said Baroud, whom he had visited November 14, a few hours after the Ambassador's call on the Minister (ref A), seemed "bruised" by recent events. According to Williams, Siniora had encouraged his cabinet ministers to coordinate with their counterparts in Damascus, and several had made official trips to Syria. For example, Shehadeh said Minister of Administrative Reform Ibrahim Shamseddine had made an

official trip to Damascus. (Note: This is the first we have heard of an official visit by Shamseddine to Damascus. End Note.) However, Siniora, said Williams, had emphasized that the GOL needs to see "behavior change" before any concrete steps are taken regarding Syria.

14. (C) Williams said the Lebanese seem to be dragging their feet regarding diplomatic ties with Syria, possibly because of increased international acceptance of the Syrian regime. British Foreign Secretary David Miliband, citing increased Syrian action on curbing foreign fighter flows and improved counter-terrorism coordination, will visit Syria (and Lebanon) this week, said Williams. French Prime Minister Francois Fillon will visit Lebanon this week; Williams had not heard if he would travel to Syria. Williams reported that he plans to ask UNSYG Ban Ki-Moon to make telephone calls to both Lebanon and Syria to deliver a message on the importance of establishing diplomatic relations with an exchange of Ambassadors. Williams did not believe the rumor that Syria had nixed the names of four individuals proposed by the GOL as the new envoy to Damascus. In his meeting with Siniora, Williams cautioned that political transitions in the U.S. and elsewhere made even more important the appearance of Lebanese willingness to cooperate with its neighbors.

15. (C) Note: In a separate meeting, March 14 SYG Fares Souaid told us March 14 had not discouraged Baroud from traveling to Syria because this would make it appear that Lebanon was to blame for any hesitancy in establishing diplomatic relations. However, March 14 was adamant that diplomatic relations be established before any new bilateral committees were formed.

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Also, on November 16, the Lebanese Cabinet voted to establish a follow-up committee to consider ways of activating cooperation between the Lebanese and Syrian Interior Ministries to combat terrorism and improve border control. End Note.

16. (C) Williams expressed concern on lack of progress on Lebanese requirements for the UNSCR 1701, given the need for UNSCOL to deliver the next 1701 report November 25 in New York. Williams encouraged progress on border security in his November 14 meeting with the Prime Minister, but he worried that little would happen before spring parliamentary elections. Williams also discussed the possibility of a visit to Lebanon by UNSYG Ban to encourage Lebanese progress on UN resolutions. He said timing of the trip is still being discussed, but the earliest Ban would likely arrive would be January 2009.

GHAJAR

17. (C) Williams indicated he expected that no progress would be made on Ghajar before the November 22 deadline; Israel has not yet responded to the UNIFIL proposal. He said UNIFIL Commander Claudio Graziano's visit to Tel Aviv had November 8 gained little traction on the issue and noted that Prime Minister Siniora had seemed "subdued" that the Israelis would not withdraw. Echoing what he had told us earlier, Siniora told Williams Lebanon would not offer anything more on Ghajar.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

18. (C) On whether potential independent candidates might be overtly backed by President Sleiman, Williams agreed with the Ambassador that Sleiman would likely avoid outward political support of an independent bloc. Williams noted that in a November 14 meeting, Minister of State Nassib Lahoud, Lahoud had argued that three "good guys" were better than ten "bad" candidates -- arguing that such a small number of independents might still make a difference. Discussing Christian votes, Williams described divisions among Maronites as "as sharp as ever" but noted Maronite Patriarch Sfeir,

arguably the only unifying figure among Lebanese Christians, seemed "as cautious as ever."

19. (C) Williams expressed concern about the Lebanese view an election observer mission as a "be all, end all" to ensure international election standards. He is considering proposing a code of conduct as part of a UN election assistance package to inform Lebanese players what is necessary on their end. Williams, however, mentioned some sensitivities to the project on the Lebanese side and also thought new legislation might be required. Williams has raised the proposal with Minister Baroud.

SISON